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Margaret Roberts THATCHER

UNITED KINGDOM

Prime Minister
(since May 1979)

Addressed as:
Prime Minister



Margaret Thatcher, leader of the Conservative Party since 1975, is the first woman ever to serve as prime minister in Britain or for that matter anywhere in Europe. She achieved the top post in the elections of 3 May 1979, when her party gained a comfortable 43-seat majority in Parliament. A self-proclaimed crusader for the economic revival of Great Britain, Thatcher has taken a tough stand on the economy, been decisive on domestic and international actions, and paid close attention to the work of the government during her first seven months as Prime Minister.

the dominant force in the Conservative Party although she lacks rivals for party leadership in the near term, she must continue to work toward further progress in accomplishing the major goals of her government or lose her position.

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Foreign Policy

The Prime Minister has demonstrated that she is both boldly ideological and shrewdly practical. She was relatively inexperienced in foreign relations when she assumed office, but she quickly surrounded herself with experienced foreign affairs specialists. In mid-1979 her highly regarded Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, persuaded her to change her policy regarding black majority rule for Zimbabwe-Rhodesia from that of immediate recognition of the government of Abel Muzorewa to support for a constitutional conference. At that conference, which is currently under way in London, the African leaders and the British Government are seeking a joint resolution of the Rhodesian problem. Thatcher, who has been somewhat skeptical of US leadership since the mid-1970s, has insisted

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on her government taking a more active role in achieving decisions on issues that affect the Western alliance. A strong advocate of NATO, she has taken a personal interest in deciding upon the most effective nuclear weapon system for Britain's arsenal. She has called on West European nations to modernize their defense forces in order to be a match for Soviet military strength. [redacted]

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Thatcher visited the United States in 1967 as a Foreign Leader Grantee. She met with then President Gerald Ford in Washington in 1975 and returned in 1977 to meet with President Jimmy Carter. Since becoming Prime Minister, she has traveled widely. [redacted]

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Career and Personal Data

The daughter of a grocer, Margaret Roberts won a scholarship to Somerville College, Oxford, where she studied chemistry. After working four years as a research chemist for an industrial firm, she studied law, specializing in tax law and patents. A member of Parliament since 1959, she has served as joint parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance (1961-64), as Secretary of State for Education and Science (1970-74), and as shadow deputy chancellor of the exchequer (1974-75). [redacted]

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Well organized, Thatcher works hard to master details of complex data. She expresses ideas clearly and logically. No recent British leader has had her powers of concentration, capacity for hard work, self-confidence, pluck and narrowness of focus. She defends her positions with skill, and she has the courage of her convictions; compromise comes hard for her, but it does come. She is a self-made woman in a party known for its male chauvinism. Thatcher is serious, dispassionate, determined and achievement oriented. There is little room in her life for the capricious or frivolous. In dealing with the news media, she tends to be crisp and somewhat patronizing; with colleagues she is honest and straightforward. [redacted]

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Thatcher, 54, enjoys music and reading. She does not smoke. She likes Cointreau and Scotch and soda, and broiled Dover sole is a favorite main dish. Thatcher's husband, Denis, retired as executive director of the Burmah Oil Company in May 1975. The Thatchers have 26-year-old twins, Mark and Carol. [redacted]

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3 December 1979

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